

Testimony of the American Sportfishing Association
“No Child Left Inside: Reconnecting Kids with the Outdoors”
The Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans and the Subcommittee on
National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the Natural Resources Committee
May 24, 2007

Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Jerry Calengor. I am Chairman of Normark Corporation an international sportfishing corporation. I am here today to testify on behalf of the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). The ASA is the recreational fishing tackle industry's trade association. We have as members over 650 companies, organizations, and agencies representing thousands of people throughout the world, includes members of the sportfishing and boating industries, state fish and wildlife agencies, federal land and water agencies, conservation organizations, angler advocacy groups and the outdoor media. We appreciate the opportunity to testify here today on this important issue.

And Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank the various angling organizations that provided material on their programs. These include the Recreational Fishing and Boating Foundation, the Alliance for Fly Fishing Education, the Daniel Hernandez Youth Foundation, Family Tyes, the Future Fisherman Foundation, and the National Recreation and Park Association.

The Status of Fishing

Recreational fishing has been and remains one of the largest outdoor recreational activities in this nation. Along with swimming and camping, it is one of the most popular outdoor activities. Over the last 5 years, over 80 million Americans have ventured into the outdoors to enjoy fishing. However, we in the industry see several disturbing trends. For many years, the growth in fishing participation followed the growth in our nation's population. But, in the mid-1990s, this trend peaked and since then fishing's popularity has started a gradual decline (see Figure 1). Unfortunately, fishing is not the only outdoor sport in stagnation or decline.

In a 2006 study, the Nature Conservancy found that Americans are growing less and less interested in spending time outside. The report showed that over a 16-year period, from 1987 to 2003, adult visitation to national parks decreased by 25 percent. It should come as no surprise that of the two dozen possible explanations for this trend, video games, movie rentals, internet use and rising fuel prices ranked the highest.

And kids are following this same trend. According to a report released in February by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the percentage of children introduced to sportfishing declined from 53 percent of the population in 1990 to 42 percent in 2000. The only good news that I can see is that this decline has appeared to have stabilized in recent years. A closer look at the data shows that this decline is in even greater in children from urban areas. No surprise there but as our society continues to urbanize, introducing our children to fishing and the positive effects it can have on their lives is proving to be a significant challenge.

And why should we care? I believe there are three primary reasons. The first is basic economics. Quite simply, anglers, boaters, and hunters pay for a significant majority of the conservation work that occurs on in this country. Each year, anglers and the industry they support pay over a billion dollars in licenses fees and excise taxes for fish and wildlife resource management. As a nation, we can't afford to lose those funding sources.

The second reason is succinctly and alarmingly illustrated in Richard Louv's recent book, *Last Child in the Woods*. Mr. Louv makes a clear connection between a series of disturbing childhood trends - the rise in obesity, attention disorders and depression - to the absence of outdoor activity in their everyday lives.

Finally, the last reason why we should be so gravely concerned about our children losing touch with the natural world may also be the most important. For as a society, if we – if our children - lose our affinity for the natural world around us, where will the next generations of stewards come from?

The Progress

In the mid-1990, the boating and fishing industries, along with state boating and fishing managers, recognized the downward trend in participation levels and asked Congress to respond. As a result, in 1998, Congress passed the Sportfishing and Boating Safety Act. The Act required the Secretary of the Interior to implement a national outreach and communication plan to address participation issues associated with recreational fishing and boating, while ensuring public support for aquatic resource conservation. The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, or RBFF, was created to carry out this mission.

Today, RBFF has eight years of experience in developing an effective, consensus based outreach and communications program for boating and fishing. I've had the pleasure of serving on the RBFF Board of Directors. By working cooperatively with state managers and the boating and fishing industries, the organization has successfully built a platform of consumer awareness and created a core constituency of stakeholder partners. RBFF is ahead of the curve in ensuring that there are a variety of programs aimed at introducing children to the outdoors.

RBFF is also ahead of the curve in doing the research that confirmed that fishing is an effective way of connecting children with nature – as well as connecting children with their families. As a result, RBFF created the “takemefishing” ad campaign – which is also, by the way, the call to action (see Figure 2). And who is making the call to action? The children, of course! It's the children who are saying “take me fishing” (see Figure 3).

The campaign has received broad industry support. Since its inception, the boating and fishing industries have contributed more than \$17 million in support through both cooperative marketing and outdoor media support. Here are some examples of those media organizations that have donated advertising space (see Figure 4) to broadcast the “take me fishing” message. RBFF has also received additional support from partners in the form of donated time, show space, value-added advertising, event placement and cooperative partnerships.

RBFF has also created a unique web site directed at connecting families to fishing and boating experiences. I would urge you to take a close look at takemefishing.org (See Figure 5) for the breadth of “where to” and “how to” information. This web site has a database of over 10,000 places to boat and fish around the country. In addition, the site has tips on family recreation, license requirements and aquatic conservation.

RBFF has also assembled the education that surrounds introducing children to fishing into a series of Best Practices. I’m pleased to report that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has endorsed the use of these guidelines in state aquatic education programs around the country. We’ve learned that one-day or half-day fishing events, although they have their place, just aren’t enough. You can’t introduce a child to fishing one Saturday in May and create a life time love of angling, and the outdoors. It takes time and repetition.

We’ve also learned that adequate skills development does work to create a long term connection to the outdoors. RBFF research has shown that being good stewards of our resources comes through repeat interaction. A child who thinks the river is cool is one thing. A child who thinks the river is cool – and who also has some fishing experience - has a much greater desire to participate in the sport and a greater awareness and concern for resource stewardship.

Finally, one of the most important things we’ve learned along the way – is that the way fishing was taught to our generation is not the way fishing is taught to today’s kids. If you’re under the age of 35, the odds are high that neither your parent nor your grandparent introduced you to angling. In a recent survey of avid anglers, among those whose dads introduced them to fishing, 88 percent were 35 or older. The majority of those under 35 are being introduced by someone else. In other words, the recruitment model that many of us in this room grew up with is no longer working!

Grassroots Efforts

While RBFF has contributed substantially to our efforts to learn and understand the best ways to introduce children to boating and fishing, as well as providing the necessary tools, much of the important work is done on the ground at the grass roots level - actually taking children fishing. A variety of clubs and organizations as well as state and federal agencies conduct such programs. Some of the better known programs are listed below.

Alliance for Fly Fishing Education

Launched in 2001, the Alliance for Fly Fishing Education (AFFE) is a collaborative partnership of national fly fishing education providers. AFFE’s mission is to generate life-long fly anglers and resource stewards through providing quality learning experiences based on Best Practices in aquatic education. AFFE accomplishes this mission by serving as the nexus for fly fishing education resources and connecting available assets (i.e., grassroots clubs, organizations, NGOs, retailers, and the fly

fishing industry) with interested newcomers to fly fishing and promoting meaningful threshold experiences and long term mentorship.

For the last 5 years, the “Discover Fly Fishing” program has conducted threshold experience fly casting programs in a general outdoors shows across the country. This program reaches over 5,000 new fly anglers annually, taking them through their first steps with a fly rod and guiding them to local resources to support and expand on their fly fishing experiences. The “Discover Fly Fishing” web site now serves as a national resource of existing fly fishing education programs and as a tool to keep the general public updated as to where to connect with high quality instruction and support.

Even though it represents a small percentage of the general angling community, fly anglers historically and by default have a close association with the natural world. A new campaign will connect local youth service organizations with their local communities fly shops, Trout Unlimited chapters and Federation of Fly Fisher clubs. This Mentor Outreach program will guide youth and adults in to the complexity of fly fishing. This project holds great promises to not only expand the sport in a meaningful way, but to educate communities about a way to interact with their local natural resources for the rest of their lives.

Daniel Hernandez Youth Foundation

Founded in 2001 by professional angler Dan Hernandez, the Daniel Hernandez Youth Foundation holds free local fishing events and boating trips throughout California in an effort to ensure that every child gets an opportunity to experience the thrill of sportfishing and a basic introduction in the marine sciences. Since its inception 6 years ago, the foundation has reached over 9,500 youths with its *Open Ocean Adventures* and lake events.

The Foundation’s events are held in underserved communities throughout Southern California. The hands-on activities help them engage an interest in and learn about marine life. The foundation utilizes two key programs “Open Ocean Adventures” which is an event catering to at-risk, inner city kids ages 7-15. The children board a chartered fishing boat and are taken out to the open ocean for a day of ocean fishing and instruction in boating safety. The “Meet Me at the Lake” program is a volunteer-lead, half-day youth fishing event at a local city lake where youth meet and interact with local firefighters and police officers as well as learn to practice casting, knot tying, and marine life education. Everything needed for a day of fun and fishing is provided free of charge to all attending children.

Family Tyes

Founded in 1979, the Family Tyes program goal is to provide youth and families with life-long, positive alternatives to negative influences. Family Tyes is committed to youth development, family values and environmental conservation. For over 20 years, the program’s fly fishing activities have reconnected thousands of Pennsylvania and New Jersey children and their families to their environment through fly fishing.

Fly fishing creates a curiosity and connection that leads directly to a lifetime passion for the natural world as well as creates a culture and language that breaks down barriers, encourages communication and fosters lasting relationships among youth and among youth and the natural world.

The Family Tyes program engages over 2,000 youth from 22 school programs in fly fishing activities including, fly tying and rod building with an extensive trip itinerary including local, state and national sites. Family Tyes offers a positive alternative to troubled lifestyles which results in opportunities for youth to gain confidence, to overcome shyness and stress, and to build confidence through achievement, hard work and commitment. When the Family Tyes system is offered collaboratively through youth-serving organizations such as at risk urban teens in inner city high school or outreach events, the experience becomes a tool of racial reconciliation, violence prevention and source of deep personal pride.

Hooked on Fishing Not On Drugs®

For more than 20 years, the Future Fisherman Foundation has been providing youth across the nation with the opportunity to learn how to fish and learn positive life skills through the Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs® (HOFNOD) program. More than 500,000 youth participate in HOFNOD programs and activities each year. HOFNOD helps reinforce academic concepts while providing important life lessons about patience, stewardship, and helping youth reconnect with themselves, their communities, and nature. The HOFNOD program is an important link to engaging youth in fishing as a life long recreational activity. Through a nation-wide network of partnerships among state aquatic educators, HOFNOD state coordinators and local volunteers, HOFNOD delivers positive life skills and angling activities in a variety of ways based on long-term mentorship programs.

Studies have shown that more than 60 percent of youth participants report a stronger interest in fishing following their participation in the program. The strong partnerships that exist among state and national groups help to fuel the need to create new conservation minded anglers. Currently, there are 23 states with active HOFNOD state coordinators and more than 14,000 instructors have been trained to conduct HOFNOD programs over the 20 year history of the program.

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) and the National Recreation and Parks Association formed a partnership in 2005 to provide community-based fishing and boating instruction and participation opportunities through NRPA's extensive parks and recreation network. The program is national in scope with 300 sites around the country including six anchor locations in Ft. Worth, TX, Baltimore, MD, Lacrosse, WI, Tacoma, WA, Columbus, OH, and Miami, FL. Recognizing fishing as an ideal way to introduce children to nature and foster long term-recreational activities, parks create on-the-water instructional programs as well as provide loaner equipment and social networking that help support continued participation.

The community based parks and recreation setting removes the majority of barriers to participation for all populations. Low- or no-cost programs in convenient, safe and familiar settings help to facilitate trial experiences for many participants. Additionally, the majority of these programs are located in urban settings close to public transportation. The “neighborhood” aspects of these parks also provide children and their families an opportunity to develop “ownership” of the resource and grow to understand and want to preserve and protect it. The 2006 pilot program featured 10 sites and touched nearly 13,000 individuals. Approximately 60,000 participants are expected in 2007.

***Physh Ed* – National Physical Education Grant Program**

The *Physh Ed* program is an educational effort coordinated through the Future Fisherman Foundation and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. The program is designed to provide K-12 public, private and charter schools the resources and training they need to teach fishing and boating as part of the school’s in-class physical education curricula. Since the program’s inception in the 2003/2004 school year, over 40,000 youth in 152 schools in 39 states have been introduced to fishing and boating. Approximately 95 new schools are expected to participate in the 2007/2008 school year.

Individual school based programs are designed to be long-term programs that focus on skill development and the infusion of conservation messages. Fishing and boating activities provide ample opportunities to children to connect with nature. The school environment provides the ideal avenue to introduce youth at an early age to the skills and knowledge needed to ensure that outdoor recreational activities such as fishing and boating remain a recreational activity for life. The success and scope of many *Physh Ed* programs expand beyond the walls of the classroom to include community based partnership programs involving local retailers, after-school clubs, and weekend and community events.

Recommendations

Mr. Chairman, the world has changed. The way children are raised has changed. Where they’re raised has changed and who’s raising them has changed. So we shouldn’t be surprised that the activities they participate in have changed. Our old model, the one I grew up with, where parents or grandparents introduced their children to the outdoors is broken. It is not working any longer, at least to the magnitude it once did.

We in recreational fishing have tried to change with the times. But as you can see, we’ve only been able to slow the decline. I would argue that if we, as a society, are to reconnect our children with nature, we need to develop a new model. Many parts of this model are outlined in Louv’s book, *Last Child in the Woods*. But one part of the model that Louv fails to address and that receives little attention is the role that federal and state resource managers could have in reconnecting our children to the natural world.

For years these managers have worked under the credo that “if we build it, they will come.” In other words, state fish and wildlife and federal land management agencies have viewed their role in managing natural resources, as exactly that....to manage

wildlife and their natural habitats. They believed, and for years it was true, that if they appropriately managed our natural resources, the public would come to enjoy it. As long as one generation took on the responsibility of introducing the next generation to the out-of-doors, this model worked.

However, the data and trends that we are addressing in this hearing suggests that this may not be true today and certainly will not be true in the future. So, I believe the job of our natural resource managers must change. Not only must they have the resources to ensure healthy abundant natural resources, they must also have the resources to design programs and policies that encourage and engage the public in enjoying the same. Our nation's future depends on it.

Figure 1: State Fishing License Holders

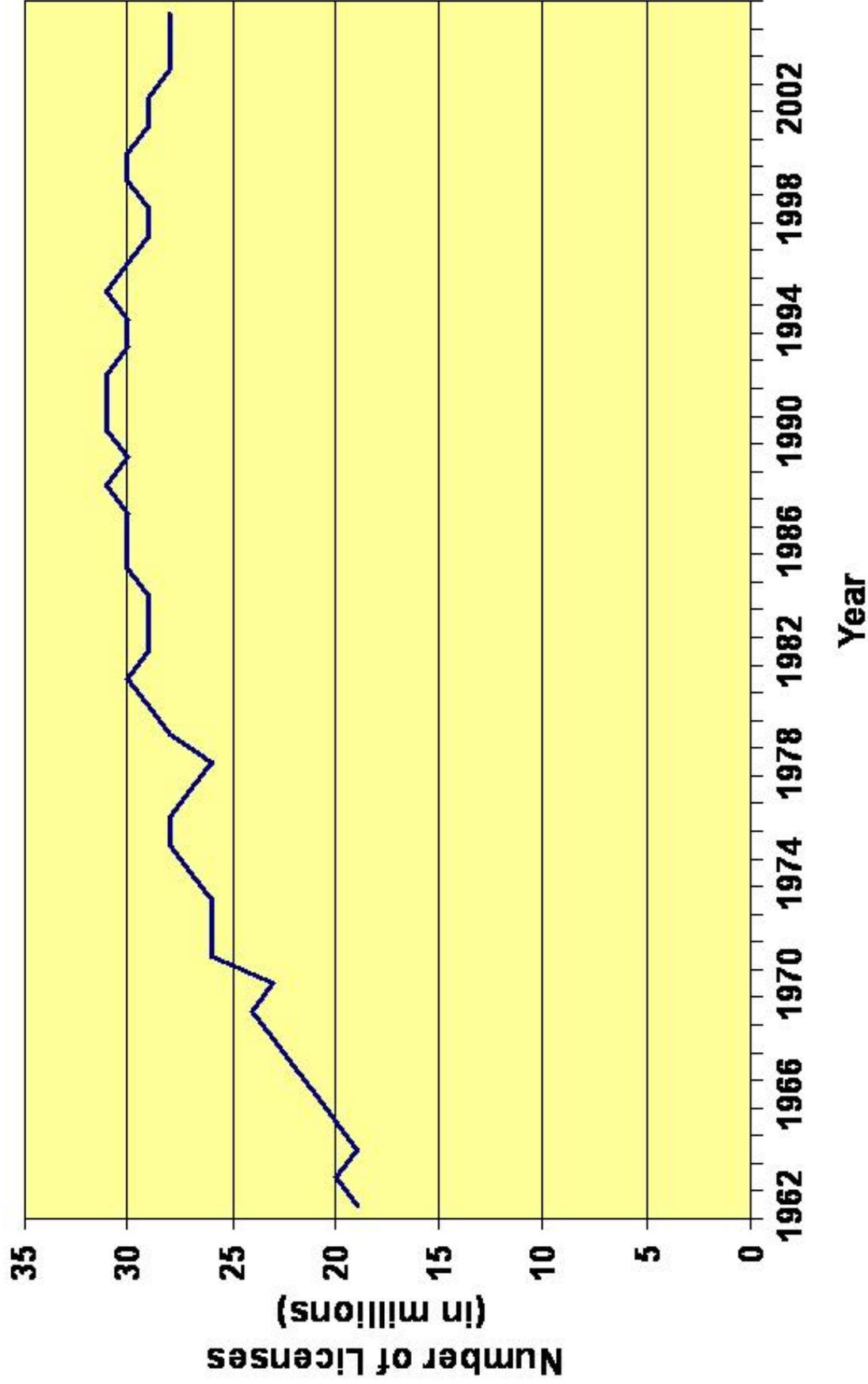


Figure 2

Take me fishing.

And I'll know you have
time for me.

Take me fishing.

Let's just get in
the boat and go.

Take me fishing.

So I can tell you about
this girl at school.

Take me fishing.

So I'll always have
something in common.



"takemefishing"

Rediscover the joy of boating and fishing. Get information and get going at takemefishing.org

Figure 3

Take me fishing.

Because you're the
coolest grandpa ever.

Take me fishing.

So you can tell me
stories about my dad.

Take me fishing.

And show me how
to drive the boat.

Take me fishing.

So I'll always remember you.



"takemefishing"

GET INFORMATION AND GET GOING AT
TAKEMEFISHING.ORG

Figure 5

The image shows a screenshot of the TakeMeFishing.org website. At the top left is the logo "takemefishing" in a stylized font. To its right is a search bar with the word "Search" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the logo and search bar are navigation links: "NEWSLETTER", "FAQ", "PRESSROOM", and "SURVEY".

On the left side, there is a vertical menu with the following items: "PLACES TO GO", "FISHING", "BOATING", "FAMILY FUN", "CONSERVATION", "SAFETY", and "EVENTS".

The main content area features a large banner with the text: "Rediscover the Joy of Boating and Fishing". Below this, it says: "Welcome to TakeMeFishing.org, where you'll find everything you need to plan your next trip. Search our database of over 10,000 places to fish and boat to find a great location near you. You'll also find tips on how to fish, fun family features, and much, much more." To the right of this text is a photograph of a young boy smiling.

Below the banner are four promotional boxes:

- KIDS FISHING HALL OF FAME**: Honoring the accomplishments of junior anglers. Nominate your kid today.
- FISHING & BOATING 101**: Read our Tip Sheets and get started today! Learn more.
- DISCOVER BOATING**: Get your Free "Get Started in Boating" DVD. Visit Discover Boating.

A blue bar below these boxes contains the text "WHAT'S NEW?" and "GET INFORMATION AND GET GOING!".

The main content area is divided into two sections: "FIND PLACES TO FISH & BOAT" and "HOW TO FISH & BOAT". The "FIND PLACES TO FISH & BOAT" section features a map of the United States with state abbreviations. Below the map, it says: "Choose your state from the map above for detailed information on fishing and boating."

On the left side of the main content area, there is a section titled "SPORT FISH RESTORATION" with a logo. The text reads: "The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration (FISRW) Program has had a major impact on sport fishing nationwide. Learn more about this great program." Below this is another section titled "HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK" with a photo of a child holding a large fish and the text: "Click here to take our website survey. We promise it isn't a BIG one!"